

HCS HB 624 -- NONMEDICAL PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

SPONSOR: Franklin

COMMITTEE ACTIONS: Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Children and Families by a vote of 9 to 3. Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Select Committee on Social Services by a vote of 6 to 3.

This bill specifies that beginning January 1, 2016, the life-time limit for participation in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program must be 30 months.

The lifetime limit must not apply to the exceptions set forth in 42 U.S.C. Section 608(a)(7), including but not limited to:

(1) Any assistance provided with respect to and during the time in which the individual was a minor child, provided that the minor child was not the head of a household or married to the head of a household; and

(2) Any family to which the state has granted an exemption for reasons of hardship or if the family includes an individual who has been battered or subjected to extreme cruelty, provided that the average monthly number of such families in a fiscal year must not exceed 20% of the average monthly number of families to which TANF is provided during the fiscal year or the immediately preceding fiscal year.

These provisions must not apply to persons obtaining assistance under the cash diversion program.

Beginning January 1, 2016, the Department of Social Services must implement a cash diversion program that grants eligible TANF benefits recipients lump-sum cash grants for short-term needs, as well as job referrals or referrals to career centers, in lieu of signing up for the long-term monthly cash assistance program upon a showing of good cause as determined by the department. The lump-sum grants must be available for use once in a 12-month period and only five instances in a lifetime. Good cause may include loss of employment, excluding voluntarily quitting or a dismissal due to poor job performance or failure to meet a condition of employment; catastrophic illness or accident of a family member that requires an employed recipient to leave employment; a domestic violence incident; or another situation or emergency that renders an employed family member unable to care for the basic needs of the family. The department must promulgate rules determining the parameters for the program as specified in the bill and develop a standardized program orientation for TANF benefits applicants about

the program's rules and requirements, available resources for work activities, and the consequences if the requirements are not satisfied. Following the orientation, applicants must sign a participation agreement in which applicants commit to participate in the program and specify the work activities in which they will participate. This participation agreement must be known as a personal responsibility plan. The department must not issue a case without confirmation that an applicant has undergone the orientation and signed a personal responsibility plan unless the individual is otherwise exempt from the work activity requirements.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the improving economy should assist people in becoming less reliant upon TANF. The goal is to change the public perspective to think of TANF as a bridge, not an island, and the legislative proposal ensures that the program stays a bridge. The legislation gives an individual time to get through the temporary situation that caused the need for public assistance but does not allow enough time for dependence upon the public assistance. The federal lifetime limit for TANF is 60 months and anything less than 60 months is a move in the right direction.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Franklin and Heartland Institute.

OPPONENTS: Those who oppose the bill say that 24 months is not a sufficient time period to eliminate the barriers to escaping poverty such as homelessness, lack of child care, lack of adequate transportation, toxic stress, insufficient wages, lack of a support network, and lack of flexible work hours. Rather than focusing on limiting assistance, the legislature should focus on overcoming poverty-related barriers that create the need for public assistance in the first place. Many of the individuals who receive TANF do not have any other support system to help them better their situations and sometimes TANF is the only support.

Testifying against the bill were Mary Esselman, Operation Breakthrough; Kayla Sullivan; and Empower Missouri.